Chaos Personified
Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/20989463.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Teen Wolf (TV)
Relationship:	Derek Hale/Stiles Stilinski
Character:	Derek Hale, Stiles Stilinski, Laura Hale, Original Female Character(s), Vernon Boyd, Erica Reyes, Isaac Lahey
Additional Tags:	Community: fullmoon_ficlet, Background Relationships, Fake/Pretend Relationship, Everyone Is Alive, Getting Together, First Kiss, Writer Derek Hale, College Student Stiles Stilinski, Professor Derek Hale, Magical Stiles Stilinski, Trickster Stiles Stilinski, Stalker Matt Daehler, Police Officer Laura Hale, Everyone Interrupts Everyone, No seriously the Pack never lets anyone finish a sentence, Chaos Interruptus
Collections:	Full Moon Ficlet Prompt #349: Study, Little Red and His Sourwolf
Stats:	Published: 2019-10-11 Words: 6057

Chaos Personified

by tryslora

Summary

The blank page and blinking cursor taunt Derek as he fails to form words. Then a strange young man drops into the seat next to him and says *please pretend to be my boyfriend.*

Notes

The alternate title for this work is "Chaos Interruptus" so... yeah. There's a lot of chaos and a lot of interrupting going on. Also, this was inspired by Prompt #349 - Study at fullmoon ficlet, because I wanted to do a fake boyfriend thing.

See the end of the work for more notes

The page taunts Derek. The flashing cursor, the inviting bright white of the screen… it screams *write on me* at him so loudly that he can't hear anything else.

The problem is, it doesn't work.

His gaze narrows, a sharp exhale punching out while he sets his fingers on the keyboard. His hands know what to do. His subconscious is ready. All he has to do is—

“Hey, sorry I’m late.”

What?

Derek looks up, his brow still deeply furrowed. “What.”

The man there flinches, his scent sharp and rough, cheeks flushed under pale skin and a constellation of moles. He smells angry, and a little nervous as he leans forward, his lips close to Derek’s ear. “I have been trying to tell a guy no for the entire year so far, and after a semester and a half he’s still following me around. I told him I was meeting my boyfriend for a study date. Please pretend to be my boyfriend.”

Derek has no patience for pushy guys who can’t take no for an answer. He growls softly, barely nodding.

A soft, relieved exhale brushes against his cheek. “Oh, thank God. I’m Stiles, and I’m going to kiss your cheek now.” Lips press softly against Derek’s scruff before Stiles pulls back and falls into the available chair in a flurry of arms and legs. He somehow manages to get his messenger bag off, pull the chair in, and dig out a notebook and a heavy text all at the same time.

Thankfully none of it hits the laptop or Derek’s coffee, although he shields both with his hand, just in case.

There’s a low, disgruntled cough.

“And that would be Matt,” Stiles murmurs, although his voice is pitched loud enough to carry. He raises his right hand and waves, then points to Derek. He stage whispers, “This is him.”

Under the table, Stiles knocks his foot into Derek’s.

Derek raises one hand, scowling at the man who has to be Matt. He doesn’t blame Stiles for avoiding him; the man smells like obsession and anger.

“So, how’s your day been?” Stiles asks cheerily, turning his back on Matt as he lays out his books.

“Busy.” Derek’s gaze is still on Matt, watchful as Matt makes his way to the counter.

Matt leans in to order, his words obscured by the general noise in the cafe. He points over to where Stiles sits with Derek, hunched over the notebook now and scribbling something, seemingly not bothered by either Derek’s curt answer or ensuing silence.

The barista hands Matt two cups, and Matt takes them to the side table to add cream and sugar before heading towards Stiles and Derek.

Derek rises, on his feet before Matt gets to the table. “You’re interrupting.”

Stiles looks up, eyes wide. “Wait. What?”

“You forgot to get coffee.” Matt sets one cup down on the table. “The barista knows your usual order. No strings attached.” His smile doesn’t reach his eyes as he raises his own cup in a silent toast. “Have a good afternoon.”

Stiles’s gaze drops back to his text, pen already moving across the paper with fresh notes. “Thanks,” he says distractedly.

Matt takes a sip and stands there with his cup in hand, still at his lips. He stares at Stiles, waiting

and watchful, but Stiles doesn't look up. When Derek growls under his breath, Matt steps back, turns quickly, and leaves.

Derek waits until Matt is outside before he picks up the cup and takes a sniff.

Yeah.

"Don't drink this," he says, setting it as far from Stiles as possible. He gestures to catch the barista's attention, tries to motion at Stiles, then at his own cup. She nods, and Derek hopes she understood that to mean to get Stiles a coffee, and put in on the tab Derek's currently running for the afternoon.

"Hm?" Stiles glances at the cup, then at Derek. He blinks. "Oh, hey, is Matt gone? I'll just dump that. I don't accept gifts from guys who set off my warning signals the way he does. I'm just trying to keep from becoming the victim of a serial killer." He closes his book, sets the pencil to mark the page in his notebook before closing that as well. "I'll just move now. Thanks for helping a guy out."

The place is packed. It usually is this time of day, which is why Derek tries to get here in the late morning and stake out a table. He keeps it for hours, but he doesn't feel bad about it since he also orders continuous coffee, buys lunch, an afternoon snack, and sometimes dinner, and he tips well when the girl at the till watches over his laptop when he needs a bio break.

Derek hates sharing his space, but there's nowhere in the cafe for Stiles to move to.

He reaches across, puts one hand on the book before Stiles can pick it up. "Might as well stay. You've already got your things out."

"You looked pretty pissed off at whatever you're studying," Stiles counters. "I don't want to get in your way if you decide to stab the laptop. Or throw hot coffee at it."

"I would never hurt my laptop," Derek deadpans. He pulls his hand back, and after a moment, Stiles sinks back into the chair. "And I'm not studying. I'm writing."

Or trying to write.

Failing to write.

Fuck.

"Thesis?" Stiles arranges the book and notebook again, pulling out highlighters and multiple colors of pens. He's reading and writing and still somehow Derek gets the feeling that he's paying attention to the conversation.

"Novel," Derek mumbles. "My second, actually. My agent's trying to sell the first, and wants me to have the sequel as done as I can get it. I've gotten stuck about a third in and can't seem to get going again."

Stiles drops the pen in his hand, a yellow highlighter dangling from between his teeth as he stares at Derek. "Dude," he says, grabbing the highlighter just before it falls and using it to point at Derek. "You are a professional author while still in college?"

"Barely a pro. A half dozen short stories, and like I said, I haven't sold the novel yet," Derek responds quickly. "And I'm not a student."

“Local?” Stiles bends back to his work.

“Professor,” Derek admits.

Stiles’s pen clatters to the tabletop. “Oh. Well. Shit, I know better than to bug—”

“You aren’t going to get in any trouble because you kissed my cheek,” Derek says dryly. It’s easy to see the panic building under Stiles’s skin, and he can also smell it clearly. “And unless you’re somehow under eighteen, I’m not in trouble either. You aren’t my student. We’ve never interacted in an academic way, and I can’t possibly affect your graduation unless you’re somehow a student in literature and have managed to remain under my radar until now.”

Stiles exhales in a quick huff. “Forensics and Classical Mythology,” he says quickly. “I took a lit class once—it was all about how Shakespeare’s into blood and wars and sex. I had Bartowski for that, and I only took it because she focuses on the intersection of myth and literature, particularly in the Elizabethan era. It was actually pretty cool, and we had a really long conversation about Puck and the—” He cuts off abruptly, cheeks going pink. “You don’t actually care about any of that.”

“Bartowski’s a good professor,” Derek agrees. She’s also something like a substitute mom while he’s here on the east coast, and Derek’s pretty sure she sends regular updates to his actual mother on a weekly basis. “You got lucky if you took a class with Naomi. She doesn’t let a lot of non-lit students in, and that one’s a graduate seminar, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, well, I also took it my sophomore year and half the other students spent the first three weeks trying to make me admit I didn’t belong in it.” Stiles shrugs, reaching for the cup as the barista drops it on the table. He grins at her, and hands her a couple of crumpled singles he pulls from a pocket. “Thanks, Beth. If you ever want to spit in Matt’s coffee, I promise I’ll make sure you don’t get fired.”

Beth rolls her eyes and walks away, the money disappearing long before she gets to the tip jar.

“I earned my participation grade that semester. There was this one girl—Erica—I swear she hated me the first day, but we got along pretty decently after that. She pushed me past a lot of limits. There were times I thought she—” Stiles stumbles to a stop, glances at Derek. “Right, rambling again. Never mind.”

Derek slowly closes his laptop, because it’s obvious he’s done writing for the moment. “What year are you?” He has a suspicion now, and he’s curious if Stiles will confirm it.

“Senior. Graduating in 34 days, thanks.” Stiles waves his pen. “That’s assuming I pass this particular lab class, and that my advisor doesn’t send my thesis back to the drawing board for the seventh time.”

Which means he took the class two years ago, when Boyd took it. Derek remembers the day Boyd met Erica, and he wonders if Stiles realizes that she’s married now.

He wonders if Stiles realizes just how real myth is, and how old Naomi Bartowski is.

He’s not going to interrupt him to ask. Instead, Derek murmurs, “Watch my stuff,” so that he can take a quick break and dump the coffee Matt delivered while he’s at it. He stops at the counter on the way back, picking up a selection of muffins and cookies, enough to fill a small tray.

It’s almost endearing the way Stiles reaches for the plate as soon as it hits the table, shoving a cookie in his mouth in its entirety, crumbs spilling out as he distractedly chews.

Derek opens his laptop again and the cursor blinks at him.

Words start to fill the far reaches of his mind.

Slowly, he begins to type.

#

“Is there a reason we’re meeting for coffee, brother mine?” Laura asks, leaning her elbows on the table as soon as she sits down. “Because usually you avoid me until I have to beg you to go out. This makes me think you need a favor.”

Derek closes his notebook, setting it on top of his closed laptop. He glances at the door and the steady stream of students flowing in and out during the break between classes.

The schedule for classes is either Monday and Thursday, or Tuesday and Friday. There are classes on Wednesdays, but they’re usually long seminars or labs.

The fact that Stiles blew through the cafe on a Monday around lunch means he might be back around the same time on Thursday.

“I need a favor,” Derek confirms.

Laura sits back, smirking as she crosses her arms. “And this favor is why you invited me here during a time when I’m not in uniform? And said to make sure I came before I got changed?”

“I need a cop who doesn’t look like a cop,” Derek confirms. His nostrils flare as he seeks scent on the air. Laura rolls her eyes in response.

“No, I do not have my gun when I’m not on duty,” she says dryly. “You know better, Derek. So. Do you have a dossier for me? Someone you think I need to look into?”

Right on cue, Stiles stumbles through the door, letting go of it despite Matt being close on his heels. He pauses on the doorstep, looking around, and his expression cycles through a quick grin and a raised hand, falling away into a more neutral uncertainty when he spots Laura sitting next to Derek. Stiles takes a step back, sidestepping quickly to somehow avoid crashing into Matt as he comes through the door.

Derek rises and pulls out the third chair at his table in what he hopes is a clear invitation.

Stiles approaches slowly, Matt far too close to him for Derek’s comfort. “Hey,” Stiles says.

“Hey.” Derek’s aware of Laura’s sudden burst of surprise as he reaches out, wraps an arm around Stiles’s waist and reels him in. Derek brushes his lips against Stiles’s cheek and murmurs, “You still have a shadow. My sister is a cop.”

Stiles blinks rapidly, looking between Derek and Laura.

Laura is now on her feet and leaning forward, reaching for Stiles until Derek tugs him back and slaps Laura’s hands away. “Sit back down,” Derek orders, pointing at her chair.

He’s a little surprised when Laura does, but her bright grin doesn’t dim.

“Woof,” Stiles says dryly, sitting in the offered chair. “I didn’t know we were at the *meet the family stage*, honey bear.”

“Oh my God, Derek, he’s adorable.” Laura manages to get around Derek’s hands, squeezing Stiles’s face between her hands. “Where the hell did you find him? Did you tell Mom? Did Naomi tell Mom? Does Cora—”

“Laura,” Derek snaps.

Maybe he should have told her the truth. Maybe he should have warned her, but he was trying to keep it from turning into… well, this. This epic disaster where his sister coos excitedly over the idea that Derek might be dating someone.

Derek pinches the bridge of his nose, his hand covering his mouth as he subvocalizes, “Keep an eye on the guy that followed Stiles in. He’s been stalking him since the start of semester, and even though Stiles told him that he and I—”

Laura holds up a hand, and Derek goes silent.

Stiles slumps in his seat. “I could have prepared better if—”

Laura wags her finger and Stiles goes silent as well.

She rises slowly, nostrils flared, and her delighted grin shifts to something feral. “I’m just going to go get us all some coffee. Mocha for Derek. Stiles, what do you—”

“The barista knows my order. Please don’t judge the number of espresso shots,” Stiles mumbles.

Laura pats his head. “Nothing’s too weird for someone who actually likes my brother.” She steps away quickly, and by the time she weasels her way into line, she’s behind Matt, despite the others already waiting.

Derek doesn’t need to watch this. Laura has her own methods, and he’s not sure if she’s just gathering data or if she’s planning on making a scene. That’s all up to her.

Stiles sits slumped, his fingers tapping on the table as he watches Laura. “Not that I don’t appreciate the save, but care to clue me in on what’s going on?” he asks softly. “Did you meet up with your sister here just in case Matt’s still stalking me?”

“No,” Derek says.

Stiles gives him a look.

Derek rolls his eyes. “Yes. I had a hunch that it’s going to take more than slapping him in the face with your relationship with me to get it through his thick head that you aren’t interested. I don’t think you’re far off in calling him a serial killer.”

Stiles cocks his head, a slow smirk starting. “You really do have a writer’s brain,” he says. “I gave you a plot and you’re building a whole story around it.”

“Are you telling me this is a set up?” There’s a cold feeling in the pit of his stomach when he sees Stiles’s smirk. Derek doesn’t want to believe it, but he could see it. It wouldn’t be the first time someone’s gone to strange lengths to arrange some kind of a meet cute with him. “Is Matt not—”

There’s a sharp bang and a thud, accompanied by a yelp of pain.

“Don’t worry, I’m the police!” Laura’s voice rings out. She has one hand in the air, her badge on display. With her other hand she has Matt’s arm twisted up behind his back as she leans into him

with her shoulder, easily keeping him pressed face down against the small condiment table.

She's making a scene. All right then.

Stiles somehow slumps more, sliding half under the table. "Nope," he mutters. "Not a setup. I literally haven't been able to get rid of Matt since the start of fall semester, and now you've called a cop on him and he's going to be arrested and I'm not sure if that's a good or a bad thing, but hey. Here we are."

Laura wrestles Matt to standing, picks up her cup with her free hand, and manages to walk him to the door without spilling a drop of her drink. "Beth will be over with your coffee in a bit," she says as she passes Derek's table. She leans in to whisper loudly, "And we'll do this again because I want to meet your new guy properly next time. I just need to go deliver this piece of work to the station, and once I'm there, they won't let me leave again." She leans in closer to Matt, her whisper far too loud to be private. "They won't let this guy leave again either. Not when I caught him in the act of spiking a coffee he ordered for someone else. Boy, I can't wait to see what kind of record he has."

Stiles facepalms.

"Thanks, Laura." Derek exhales as she goes, and the chatter in the cafe dies down. He can still hear murmurs of disbelief, wondering what Matt was planning, wondering if any of them were safe with him around.

Having Laura haul him off is for the best, really. Especially where Stiles is concerned.

"Thanks." Stiles is back to tapping at the table. He doesn't look up when Beth sets two cups on the table, and Derek slips his credit card to her. If anything, he taps his fingers faster. "I appreciate it."

There's no lie in the words, but Stiles is leaving something out.

"I embarrassed you," Derek says.

"Startled," Stiles admits. "It's not easy to catch me off-guard. I'm pretty much—eh, there's a lot of chaos in my life."

"Hadn't noticed."

Stiles pulls himself to sitting upright, gestures at Derek's laptop and notebook. "You planning on doing some more of your writing?"

It's easy to open his laptop and his plotting notebook, spreading them out on the table to somehow work around the space that Stiles takes over with his own things. They fit together like a puzzle, and Derek lets the noise of the cafe fade away, the soft and steady beat of Stiles's heart anchoring him while he works.

#

Derek's phone rings before he can make it inside his apartment. He leverages open the door while trying to juggle the phone and the bag of groceries. There are voices and heartbeats inside, but there's no point in trying to hide this conversation so he just puts it on speaker as he steps into the apartment. "Hey, Mom."

"Darling." Talia's voice echoes, and Derek is absolutely positive that he's on speaker as well. His father is probably there, and possibly Cora. There could be others.

Boyd glances up, brow furrowed, from where he sits with Erica on the couch. Isaac appears and takes the groceries from Derek, leaving him with just the phone.

“Laura called,” Talia says.

Derek sighs.

“We’re planning on coming out for Isaac’s graduation in May,” Talia continues as if she hadn’t heard him. “We’d like to meet this young man. I’m guessing that since Laura met him, it’s serious.”

Boyd’s eyebrows go up. He looks at Erica and mouths, “young man?”

She shrugs in response.

“Mom, it’s—” Derek is absolutely aware that there are three people staring at him, and that he has no idea who is on the other end of the phone. No, four people on his side—he hears Laura’s footsteps on the stairs. “It’s complicated,” he says quickly. “I don’t know how serious it is, but yes, if we’re together, and if he has time, you can meet him. Graduation’s a month away, and he’s probably got family coming, too.”

“Wait, you’re dating a guy from my year?” Isaac calls out. He chops through an onion, and Derek winces at how emphatic the sound is.

“He’s an absolute cutie,” Laura yells, even though she’s still halfway up the stairs. “He has freckles.”

“Moles,” Derek corrects her before he thinks it through. He winces when she coos, and his mom chuckles softly.

Fuck, this is out of hand and he needs to find a way to reel it in.

He takes the phone off speaker and cradles his hand around it as he moves to his room and closes the door. It won’t silence the conversation, but they’ll have to work harder to listen in. “Mom, can you just give me some time? I needed Laura’s help with—”

“She told me,” Talia interrupts, her tone more serious. “She also told me that the man she arrested was not only carrying multiple ways to drug humans, but at least two varieties of wolfsbane and a vial of mountain ash.”

“What?” Derek pulls the phone from his ear, stares at it.

“He had a very disturbing record, once she ran his prints. Apparently Matt isn’t his real name. He’ll be—”

“Mom.” Derek interrupts her, because he has a feeling this is going to get long-winded and right now Laura is in his living room, telling the rest of their small pack all about Stiles. Who she thinks he’s dating. “I need to—Laura—you know what she—” He stumbles over the explanation, but she murmurs something in response.

“I know exactly what she’s like, and I’m sure she’s excited on your behalf. Go,” Talia orders.

Derek ends the call and drops the phone on his bed, leaving it there as he heads back to the living room.

“Wasn’t Stiles the name of—”

“That guy in our Shakespeare seminar two years ago.” Erica claps her hands. “It’s such an unusual name. That has to be him, right? Derek, you have to ask your boyfriend if he took—”

“He did. I hadn’t told you yet.” Derek drops onto the couch, pushing Erica closer to Boyd, which is never a problem. “And it’s not what you think. So Laura, please stop spreading stories. If you tell Cora—”

“Already done.” Laura sits perched on the edge of one chair, leaning forward. She waves away the thought of Cora like it’s nothing.

Derek resigns himself to getting at least one more phone call later, unless Cora was with his mother and already heard everything. No, Cora wouldn’t be satisfied with that. He’ll be getting a call later no matter what.

“That stalker was a piece of work,” Laura continues. “Turns out his real name is Michael and Matt is just one of seventeen known aliases. He’s also not twenty-two, but he’s supernaturally young looking. I brought Naomi in to consult when I found wolfsbane and mountain ash on him. Naomi was pretty surprised to find out that you’re dating Stiles, Derek.”

“I’m not dating Stiles.” He tries not to yell, but it comes out louder than he means to, echoing off the walls of the apartment.

“The louder you protest, the more likely it’s true,” Isaac deadpans. “Isn’t that what you said to me about my crush on—”

“It’s not true,” Derek mutters.

“Interrupting. Violently opposed to the idea.” Isaac ticks the points off on his fingers.

“They had PDA,” Laura says. “PDA that happened in public.”

“That’s the definition of PDA,” Derek says dryly. “It was for show. I’m trying to help him get Matt to stop stalking him.”

“Matt has been arrested and is being sent back to Oklahoma where there are three warrants for his arrest,” Laura counters quickly. “He’s not going to be a problem. So let’s just get back to that public kiss and nuzzle, and the fact that he called you *honey bear*.”

Erica cackles. “Oh my God, Derek, you are so gone on him.”

This is….

This is not happening.

How did this get so out of control?

Derek opens his mouth, closes it again. “My phone,” he says, because it’s vibrating against his bed. The sound is faint, and maybe no one else noticed it, but it’s a valid escape in the moment.

He rushes back to his room to grab it, wincing when he sees the name on the screen. “Naomi. Hi. Let me guess, you talked to Laura.”

“Well, yes, I did consult for her today, but actually, that’s not exactly what I wanted to talk to you about.” Naomi’s voice is low and kind, pitched as if she has bad news to impart. It’s a tone Derek’s

become all too familiar with since he and Laura first arrived in New York, and he hates that he's hearing it now.

"And what—shit." Derek spins as his door slams open and Laura leans in the doorway.

"You need to know one important thing," she whispers. "I arrested Matt because he was spiking Stiles's drink. With the mountain ash."

Derek blinks, not sure what to do with that piece of information.

"Can you stop over, Derek? After dinner, tonight, unless you can come sooner," Naomi suggests.

Derek needs to get out. "I'll be there soon," he promises, and ends the call so he can shove the phone in his pocket. "Laura, stay here with the pack. Don't wreck my apartment. Don't let Erica and Boyd snuggle in my room. Help Isaac clean the kitchen after. When I get back only Isaac—who actually lives here—should be here."

He's not sure he's even been home thirty minutes yet, but he stalks out past the pack, ignoring their questions that he can hear all the way down three flights of stairs. He heads out into the spring evening, and starts walking, shoulders hunched.

Chaos.

Nothing's been quite normal since Stiles barreled into Derek's life on Monday.

#

There's a baby blue Jeep that's seen better days parked outside of Naomi's small house. She lives several blocks from the closest subway station, in a place made of houses instead of the high rises that populate Derek's block, several stops down the line. The time on the train gave him a chance to breathe. To relax and take stock.

It didn't help, and spotting the fact that Naomi has company just brings the tension back to his shoulders.

He rolls his head as he waits for her to respond to the door; his neck cracks loudly.

When the door opens and Stiles stands on the other side, Derek can't even be surprised. Not any more.

"Chaos," he says.

Stiles shrugs one shoulder, waves his hand with his long fingers spread. "I said there's a lot of chaos in my life," he admits.

"I think it's contagious," Derek mumbles. He spots Naomi in the background where she waits, a small island of calm. Derek steps inside, carefully avoiding Stiles as he does so. "Laura called my mother."

"Well, she should know that you're seeing someone," Naomi murmurs.

Stiles darts a look at Derek, and Derek feels his cheeks heat. "We're not actually dating," Derek says. "You know that, right?"

"I tried to tell her," Stiles agrees, nodding quickly. "I explained. Several times."

Naomi snorts softly. “That’s not what your scent says. Either of you, now that I can smell Derek as well.”

“We’re not dating.” It’s frustrating how no one seems to listen to him. Derek points at Stiles, tries to explain since Naomi at least should let him finish a sentence without interrupting. “Stiles was being stalked. He asked if I’d pretend to be his boyfriend to get Matt off his back. I brought Laura in because I didn’t think Matt would back off, and it turned out I was right. Only it also turned out that both Matt and Stiles happen to be supernatural?” He ends on a querying note, because he’s pretty sure he’s put this all together at this point, but he’s adding up two and two and hasn’t quite made it to four yet.

“When Stiles joined the school, he came under my protection,” Naomi confirms. “I wasn’t aware of Matt’s presence here; he is not officially a student, nor did he approach me.”

“I had no idea he wasn’t just human,” Stiles mumbles. “Sorry about that. On the other hand, I didn’t know you were furry, either, until Naomi mentioned. Sorry about the dog joke when you told Laura to sit. Wouldn’t have done it if I knew you were a wolf.”

Derek raises an eyebrow.

Stiles flushes. “Okay, I would’ve totally said it if I knew you were a wolf.”

Something goes warm in Derek’s chest at that.

Naomi smiles.

Fuck.

“Stiles is, for lack of a better way of putting it, chaos personified,” Naomi says. She gestures, and Derek follows, the scent of a rich tomato sauce reminding him that he walked out before Isaac finished cooking dinner. Naomi gestures, and Derek takes a seat at the table.

“Sit. Woof,” Stiles whispers as he takes the seat next to him, and Derek’s chest goes warm all over again.

He glares at Stiles, but he knows Stiles can read him when Stiles just grins and leans closer. “Aw, honey bear.”

“I am uncertain how anyone with a nose could believe the two of you are unattached.” Naomi puts a large bowl of pasta bolognese on the table. “You reek of each other, even after so little time in each other’s company.”

“Naomi.” Derek takes the serving spoon when she hands it to him. He serves Stiles first, then fills Naomi’s bowl before his own. “Could someone back up and explain things? I knew—I knew Stiles was in your class. He mentioned Erica, so I knew he took that class when Erica and Boyd met.” He glances at Stiles. “They’re married now.”

Stiles fist pumps. “Awesome. I totally told her she should take a chance on jumping his bones. Good work, Catwoman.” He pauses, then adds, “So, that means she’s a werewolf, too?”

Derek nods slowly. “When did you figure out that I was?”

“When Laura took Matt out. I didn’t know he was anything.”

“Witch, nothing more than that.” Naomi dismisses the idea with a flick of her fingers. “Human

with delusions of grandeur. Your magic is far more powerful, Stiles."

"And absolutely uncontrolled." Stiles makes a face. "I'm—we just call ourselves the People. Descendents of a trickster god, and it's the kind of thing that lies dormant and comes out only every few generations, so it's not well known. Both my mom and dad were descended from the People, but Dad didn't know about it until I manifested. Mom was raised in the myth, so she knew, and things were chaotic for a while when I was a kid. They've always been chaotic around me. That's my magic. Pretty much chaos personified. Plus I can shapeshift into a few different forms." He spreads his hands like that's not important. "The magic can be problematic."

"It's attracted attention at odd times, like Matt," Naomi says quietly. "And it tends to nudge him into places where he needs to be." She looks at Derek, as if waiting for him to come to some conclusion.

He's not sure he likes the conclusion.

"Are you saying he cast some kind of love spell on me?" Derek says, a soft growl under his breath.

"No!" Stiles jumps up, knocking his fork onto the floor as he waves his hands in front of Derek. "No, God, no. Not a love spell. I just ended up in the right place at the right time and in the lap of a guy who I am maybe a little overly attracted to and apparently our scents decided to sync up like we've been married a decade already so now we're exuding highly intense fuckbuddy vibes to anyone who happens to smell us."

Naomi coughs.

Stiles amends his words. "Highly intense feelings, too. According to the magic around us. It's not like binding or anything. You and me—we can do whatever we want about it. People around us are probably going to be giving us shit about having dated in secret, though."

"I…." Derek's voice trails off. "I don't even know what to say to this," he mumbles. "I'm a little overwhelmed."

"Our Derek doesn't date," Naomi murmurs.

"Naomi." He tries to be sharp, but it comes out like a whine. "Fuck. Okay. So."

"So?" Stiles reaches for the fork that isn't there, and Derek hands him his instead. It's not like Derek wants to eat right now anyway.

Stiles takes a huge forkful of pasta and Derek really should be disgusted by his enthusiasm for the food.

Except he's not.

"Do you remember our discussions of the tree of life, Derek?" Naomi asks.

Derek thinks of the manuscript sitting unfinished on his laptop. "Can't forget. It's a major theme in my current book."

"Every branch forks into multiple options, ever changing," Naomi says.

"Chances." Derek thinks of the new character he just introduced, someone who is capable of seeing all the possibilities and leaping between them, creating paths where there are none, and stitching together possibilities that might not otherwise exist in the same place. "Chaos is like a

squirrel that leaps from one branch to another."

"Did you just call me a squirrel?" Stiles points at Derek with a forkful of pasta. "Dude."

"Exactly like that." Naomi pushes back from the table, putting her unused fork in front of Derek. "If you don't mind, I need to make a phone call before your mother calls me."

Stiles goes pale. "Um."

"No matter which mother she's calling, it's trouble for us," Derek murmurs. He leans close to Stiles to do it, inhaling a soft scent of soap and spice. When Stiles turns to look at him, they're close enough that all Derek has to do is tilt his head in invitation and Stiles leans in to press their lips together.

It's soft and chaste, and still Derek's chest goes hot all over again.

"I didn't plan to go into that cafe on Monday," Stiles says quietly as they part. He brings up one hand, lightly touches Derek's jaw. "I was trying to find somewhere safe—that's all I wanted, was someplace I'd be safe from Matt. And I turned in there, spotted you, and I just… walked over and dropped into that seat and hoped you'd go with it. And you did."

"Chaos," Derek says.

Stiles nods and smiles slightly. "Yeah. Chaos. So."

"So," Derek replies.

He can see the possibilities spreading out like branches. All the options, all the different ways that life could go.

And then there's Stiles, poised to leap from one space to another.

Derek matches his smiles and slides one hand behind the nape of Stiles's neck. He pulls him closer, moving slowly to give Stiles a chance to say no. But Stiles meets him, and this time the kiss is far from chaste as Derek licks into Stiles's mouth, and Stiles whines and clings to him in response.

"I'm sorry, I can't let you talk to him right now." Naomi's voice echoes clearly, despite her not being in the room. "I think they left a little bit ago. Something about privacy."

"Pretty sure that's a hint." Stiles rises, his cheeks bright red beneath the moles. Derek wants to lay him out somewhere, and see just how many moles he has, map them all with his tongue.

When Stiles offers a hand, Derek takes it. They both move quietly to the door, open it as carefully as he can.

"I'll tell him to call you when he can," Naomi's voice follows them.

They emerge into the night, hands still clasped. Stiles looks at him, grinning. "So. Where are we going?"

So many possibilities, so many branches. So many ways this could turn out.

"I have no idea," Derek says, and motions for Stiles to lead the way. "Seems like I'm dating chaos personified, so I think we'd better get used to expecting anything. And I think I'm okay with that."

They still have a lot to talk about and even more to figure out. But for now, Derek's willing to

follow where Stiles leads, however chaotic that might be.

End Notes

You can find me (mostly silent) on Tumblr as tryslora and on Pillowfort as tryslora. I also write original fiction! If you like my fic, you might like my original twice-weekly series Welcome to PHU (also mirroring on Pillowfort at Welcome to PHU).

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